**Helping teens see a future while getting through today**

By Dallas Morning News, adapted by Newsela staff

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When Jordan Henderson was 18 he was arrested for drug distribution. He has turned his life around and now sees a positive future. "I always thought it would be much better to be dead than in jail," he said in his Richardson, Texas, neighborhood on May 9, 2014.

DALLAS — Jordan Henderson grew up in a neighborhood torn by apart by gangs and crime. The 18-year-old could see no future for himself, so he got involved in drugs.

He just prayed he would live until he was 21.

Henderson’s choices shouldn’t come as a surprise, according to a new study. Teens who believe they will die young are more likely to break the law. And their crimes are more serious.

The study asked one question of more than 1,300 young criminals in Arizona and Pennsylvania: How long do you think you will live? They said they expected to live from 16 to 200 years old. Researchers then checked in with them from time to time over seven years. They asked the young people whether they committed any new crimes.

The teens who did not expect to live very long committed the most crimes. Those who could imagine a future stopped breaking the law.

**Lives Can Change**

Alex Piquero studies crime at the University of Texas at Dallas. He led the study. People should not say these kids are all bad and will be bad forever, Piquero said.

Letting kids know that their lives can change makes a big difference.

For a long time, Henderson felt he could not change his life. None of the adults around him went to college and many of them sold drugs. Earlier this year, Henderson was arrested for selling marijuana.

He said he had no hope. “I thought to myself, this is the lifestyle that everybody before me shows. This is the lifestyle that everyone around me is doing and this is the lifestyle I have to choose."

That’s something 15-year-old Merl Lovings can relate to. His father is in jail serving a 15-year prison sentence.

Last year, Lovings stole a BB gun.

**Success Is Possible**

Lovings thinks he will live to be about 50 or 60. But right now, he worries about his young brother and sister. He sells candy to help support them.

He hasn't thought much about his own future. Lovings has vague ideas of joining the Navy or becoming a rap star.

Piquero said that many young lawbreakers do not plan for the future. “They have to basically survive today. And they can’t even think about 30 years from now,” he said.

Piquero thinks the government should give more help to poor teens.

But he said parents and teachers also play a big role. They need to tell teens that success is possible. They also should encourage teens to develop long-term goals. Piquero said.

A good day’s work and a pat on the back makes a difference, said Chad Houser.

Houser is the head of Cafe Momentum. The nonprofit restaurant gives jobs to young men coming out of jail. The men live in neighborhoods full of trash, with guns around every corner. Many of them worry about their next meal.

**A "Good Job"**

In their world, an early death is possible, said Houser. They see it all around them. Houser said he’s never heard a teen talk about living beyond age 20.

Through the program, they learn to prepare and serve food in fine restaurants. This gives them something to live for and work toward. And they begin seeing a future for themselves, Houser said.

“It works in every case,” Houser said. “When you give them hope and encouragement and literally -- as silly as it sounds -- a pat on the back, a ‘good job,’ it changes their" attitude.

For Henderson, his arrest for marijuana became a turning point. He went back school. He will now attend Fisk University in Tennessee.

Henderson now hopes he can live into his 90s to see his children and grandchildren.

“I pray that I live to see the generational curse I’m so accustomed to be broken,” he said. “To be that difference maker, to be that one person who decided to make a change … that, to me, would be the hope I never got.”